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THE WAR WITH SPAIN—III.

BY MAJOR-GENERAL NELSON A. MILES, COMMANDING THE
UNITED STATES ARMY.

THE success of Captain Dorst's expedition, in which he supplied Garcia's Cuban troops with 7,500 rifles, a million cartridges and a large amount of war material, had contributed its part toward the general results. So did the hazardous journey made by Lieutenant Rowan, U. S. Army, who landed at El Portillo, about 70 miles west of Santiago de Cuba, on April 24th, visited General Garcia's camps, crossed the island to Manati on the north coast, and sailed thence on May 4th in an open boat to Nassau, New Providence. He had succeeded in gaining full knowledge of the condition of affairs existing prior to the campaign at Santiago.

At about the same time an important reconnaissance was made by Lieutenant Whitney, U. S. Army, through Puerto Rico. He left the United States on May 5th and reached St. Thomas. There he shipped as a common sailor on board a British tramp steamer, and after many adventures and vicissitudes got himself put ashore on the island of Puerto Rico. His risk was as great as an officer could take, for, being in disguise, under an assumed name, in the midst of the enemy, without other protection than his wits, the penalty of capture would have been nothing short of a spy's death. He visited Ponce and other places, explored the southern portion of the island, and left there June 1st, returning to Washington June 9th, in time to accompany me to Santiago and Puerto Rico. The information he gained concerning the position of the Spanish troops, the topography of the country, the character of the inhabitants, the resources and amount of supplies available, and especially his reports of the condition of the harbors, I afterward found to be most important.

Before the command under General Shafter started from

Tampa for Santiago, the general plan of campaign was to effect either the capture or destruction of the Spanish fleet under Cervera, and then make an attempt to capture the island of Puerto Rico. The island was considered the key to the possession of the West India Islands, and therefore of very great strategical importance. With that end in view I was, on the 26th of June, directed to organize a second expedition to campaign "in Cuba and Puerto Rico;" but the resistance which our troops met with at Santiago and the call for an additional force at that point made it necessary to send forward portions of the command intended for the second expedition to reinforce the command at Santiago.

The destruction of the Spanish fleet and the capture of the garrison having been completed, the expedition to Puerto Rico became the next object of immediate importance. To return to Washington and organize a large expedition, or to assemble one on the north coast of the island of Cuba, in the Bay of Nipe, would require much time when time was extremely valuable, and, as I believed, of vital importance. As to taking any part of the command that had landed in the vicinity of Siboney and Santiago, very serious consideration was given, owing to the fact of the appearance of yellow fever. Reports were called for from all of the regiments that were then in Cuba. These were carefully examined each day to ascertain if any of the regiments were free from infection, and it was found that there was not a single regiment that had not been represented on the surgeons' reports as having some cases of this dread disease, ranging from the lowest number to as high as 33 cases to a regiment. There had been nearly 500 cases of yellow fever reported by the surgeons. In addition to these, there were many reports of sickness, great weakness and prostration among the troops, which I then supposed were caused by exposure and climatic influences, and I did not suspect them to have been augmented, as I believe now, by other causes. It was therefore considered injudicious to take any portion of that command, and it was necessary to make up the expedition for Puerto Rico entirely independently of the force (upwards of 17,000 troops) left on shore in Cuba. I was only able to gather 3,414 fighting men for that enterprise, and so reported by cable. This included those who had fallen sick since sailing from the States, the effective force being about 3,300 men.

This seemed hardly a sufficient force with which to invade an

island defended by about 20,000 troops. The available United States troops were still on board the transports and had not come into contact with the troops affected with the yellow fever. As soon as the necessary transportation could be arranged for, with proper supplies, and a convoy secured from the fleet, the command was to sail.

The expedition rendezvoused at Guantanamo harbor, some fifty miles east of Santiago, a well-sheltered harbor, which the navy had captured and utilized very much to their advantage.

After four days of most active preparation at Guantanamo, the expedition sailed on the afternoon of July 21st, under the escort of a convoy commanded by Captain (now Admiral) Higginson, of the battleship "Massachusetts."

Before sailing from Guantanamo I had expected to receive from the harbor of Santiago tugs, lighters and appliances for disembarking, and I had hoped to meet during the night, when traversing the Windward Passage, similar appliances for landing, but when day dawned this hope had been dispelled. The expedition turned eastward, moving slowly along the northern coasts of Haiti and San Domingo, pursuing almost the identical track followed by the Great Admiral on his first voyage of discovery as he prepared to return to Spain four centuries before.

On the evening of the 23d we passed in sight of the point of land on the northern coast where the first Spanish colony was planted by Columbus.

About three centuries ago a disaster had resulted to a British expedition against the Spaniards, worthy of mention at the present time. The expedition had originally been directed against the very point of Puerto Rico for which we had set sail. It was under the command of two of England's most famous naval heroes. The circumstance is related at some length by the historian Hume, but more briefly by Knight, who says: "Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Hawkins sailed with six of the Queen's ships, and twenty others fitted out at private charge, having on board a considerable land force, commanded by Sir Thomas Baskerville. They made an assault on Puerto Rico, but they were repulsed.

A century ago, after the Franco-Spanish alliance against England, the British prepared to weaken Spain through attacks on her colonies. A squadron was assembled in the West Indies under the command of Sir Ralph Abercrombie, which at-

tacked the Spanish fleet in the bay of Port of Spain, Island of Trinidad, and captured the island, with 200 pieces of artillery and all its stores. The English then turned their eyes toward Puerto Rico, as being the nearest Spanish island of importance. Abercrombie landed his troops off the little hamlet of Cangrejos and made several determined attempts to take San Juan; but after two weeks of desultory bombarding and skirmishing was finally forced to depart, with a total loss of 230 killed, wounded and missing.

On the 24th of July we passed off the Bay of Samana, whence Columbus, in January, 1493, took his departure for home. Had he sailed east, instead of northeast, on his return home, he would have found the large island of Puerto Rico, which at that time was known among the Indians as the Island of Carib.

The first clash of the coming contest was to be between the invaders and a dependency of Spain wherein Spain's authority had been maintained for three hundred and ninety years (since the island was captured and subjugated by Ponce de Leon), and was yet unquestioned.

Realizing the fact that our destination had undoubtedly become known to the enemy, the problem presented was one requiring most serious consideration. In fact, the following items appeared in the Washington papers and were doubtless cabled to Madrid and back to San Juan de Puerto Rico as soon as published in the press of the United States.

On July 22d this item was published : “*Miles on his way—Left with 3,000 men yesterday afternoon for Puerto Rico.*

“Secretary Alger believes that General Miles, on the ‘*Yale*,’ will arrive at his destination Sunday morning, with 3,000 men under his immediate command.”

On the 23d it was announced that “General Miles is now east of Cape Haytien,” etc., and on the morning of the 24th appeared the following :

“*St. Thomas, July 23.*

“The Spaniards at San Juan de Puerto Rico are making extensive preparations to resist an anticipated attack upon the part of the United States warships which are understood to be convoying the army of invasion commanded by General Miles. There were no signs this morning of the American warships or transports, but news of them is expected soon.”

The point for disembarkation, Point Fajardo, for which we had set sail, had been originally selected at the instance of the officers of the Navy. This point was on the northeast corner of Puerto Rico, and presumably the Spanish commanders must have obtained information of our destination and our strength. Later it was learned that they had been apprised of both and had actually proceeded to concentrate their forces and commence constructing entrenchments and fortifications with a view to a stubborn and effective resistance. Acting on the principle that a military commander should do that which the enemy least expects him to do, I determined, under the circumstances, to change my point of disembarkation from the northeast coast of the island to Guanica, on the southwest coast, and within easy striking distance of Ponce, the principal city and commercial emporium of the island.

Instead of making a demonstration at Pt. Fajardo, it was finally decided to go direct to Guánica.

Of course, the tugs, the launches and other fleet steamers of the enemy in Puerto Rico must have been on picket duty well out from the northwest shores of the island, ready to give quick notice of the discovery of the skyward-curling smoke of the approaching squadron, which would be seen by them long before they themselves could be observed from the squadron, and hurry back to announce its approach by telegraph from Aguadilla or Arecibo, as the case might be. They might fairly have reported that the squadron standing well out to sea was sweeping eastward off to Mona Passage, which meant, of course, its probable appearance at Fajardo on the morrow. But later that squadron, having turned sharply south, was plowing the Mona Passage, its officers and men having had their first glimpse of the mountain peaks of Puerto Rico through the dim, misty light of the eastern horizon. Under cover of the darkness of night the fleet was quietly stealing down the broad passage, every light extinguished, and even the port holes on the port side closed, notwithstanding the intense heat and close atmosphere. In the gray shadowed light of the evening and night the fleet presented a picture unlike anything I had ever seen before.

One familiar with the western plains of a quarter of a century ago might well have been reminded of a pack of large gray wolves cautiously and noiselessly moving in the shades of night, or the dim light that ushers in the dawn, upon their prey.

What the morrow should bring none could foretell.

There was more anxiety than sleep during the weary hours of that night, and early the next morning we went on deck to witness the first appearance of the Caribbean sun. The picture at 5 o'clock was one never to be forgotten.

The squadron had some time before doubled the islands which stand out like sentinels at the southwestern extremity of the island, and was now trailing directly toward the east, with a magnificent land view sharply defined in the distance to our left.

Suddenly the "Massachusetts" is seen to turn abruptly to the left and lead directly toward the land, every ship in her wake turning exactly at the same place. There is much signalling among the warships, which the landsmen could not decipher, and an opening into the inland gradually emerged to the view out of the hazy distance. At length the "Massachusetts" heaves to, broadside on, in front of the opening, her brave men standing at quarters and her decks cleared for action. More signalling follows, and the "Gloucester" takes the lead, with the Stars and Stripes in extravagant proportions glistening in the morning sunlight from her mainmast, manœuvres for a brief time between the "Massachusetts" and the entrance, and then is seen to move slowly and cautiously forward, straight into the channel between the two bold headlands which mark the place of ingress to the harbor of Guánica, beyond one of which she soon disappears, her officers and men keeping a sharp lookout for masked batteries above and submarine mines below. Soon she sends back in the thunder of her guns the announcement that she is clearing the shores to make the landing of her small company of marines safe. She was immediately followed by the transports, and every available boat from them and from the naval vessels was freighted with eager and fearless troops. The navy rendered cordial and invaluable aid in disembarking troops and supplies. Ten lighters were captured at Guánica and a few days later seventy more at Ponce.

By 11 o'clock on the morning of the 25th a firm footing had been established and the American flag raised.

While at sea the organization of the various bodies into a Provisional Division had been effected. It consisted of two brigades, the first of which, composed of the 6th Massachusetts and 6th Illinois Volunteers, was placed under the command of Brigadier-General G. A. Garretson, and the second, composed principally of

artillery, under the command of Major Lancaster, 4th Artillery; the immediate command of the whole being assigned to Brigadier-General Guy V. Henry.

On the evening of the 25th a company of the 6th Massachusetts, on outpost duty on the Yauco road, were made aware of the presence of the enemy, and General Garretson sent two additional companies to their support. About 2 o'clock on the morning of the 26th the enemy opened fire upon our advance, whereupon General Garretson proceeded at the head of five more companies of that regiment to their assistance, and on his arrival, when he discovered that the enemy were preparing to make a surprise and attack, he immediately assumed the aggressive and drove them from their position, compelling their hasty retreat on Yauco. Great credit is due General Garretson for his courage, skill and enterprise in winning the first fight on Puerto Rican soil. In fact, the first engagement is always of great importance, because of its moral effect upon the troops of both sides.

Two days later the town of Yauco was occupied by a detachment of General Garretson's brigade, giving us possession of the railroad and main highway, by which a direct march upon Ponce was feasible, although that place was occupied on the same day by troops moved by sea.

On the 27th Major-General Wilson and Brigadier-General Ernst arrived from Charleston with part of the brigade belonging to the command of the latter, the 2d and 3d Wisconsin Volunteers. On the same day the "Annapolis" and the "Wasp" joined Captain Higginson's squadron.

With the force at Yauco threatening from the rear, the command was now strong enough to move directly against Ponce from the sea. General Wilson was therefore directed to hold his command on board ship, move outside the harbor and anchor, in readiness to follow in the wake of the battleship "Massachusetts" when, during the night, she should steam for the harbor of Ponce.

Early on the morning of the 28th, just as General Wilson was entering the harbor of Ponce, the "Mobile" arrived, bringing the balance of Ernst's brigade, the 16th Pennsylvania Volunteers, and also two companies of the 6th Illinois, which had been left at Charleston for want of room on the "Yale" and "Columbia."

The "Dixie," the "Annapolis" and the "Wasp," all under command of Commodore Davis, had entered the harbor on the pre-

vious evening to reconnoitre, and found it was neither fortified nor mined. The garrison of La Playa had fled. The commander of the Spanish forces at Ponce had been censured and imprisoned for not making a strong defence, but it would have been fruitless if not disastrous for him to do so, as he would have been menaced both in front and rear by a superior force.

On the morning of the 28th, the army took possession of the city and its port, La Playa.

General Wilson, a very distinguished general of high rank and important command in the Civil War, was placed in immediate command of the city.

Soon after landing at Guánica an incident occurred which impressed me very forcibly. While I was supervising the operations on shore, a white-haired mulatto, who spoke a little English, pressed his way to the head of my horse and inquired if I was the commander. Being answered in the affirmative, he handed me a small packet, which he had carefully concealed, which proved to be a communication in Spanish. Translated, it read as follows:

"To the Chief of Operations of the Invading Army of the American Union:

"Citizen: Not knowing exactly how I ought to guide myself in entering into a direct communication with your camp, I direct this to the Chief of Operations, to express to you my duty in these historical moments, and that trust in the power of a strong conscience and in the valor of arms as they pertain to the great issues of liberty and of patriotism in this island. An absolute military censorship shuts out from the city the means of obtaining the news, and I wish that you and your companions may know the true feeling of our municipality. Here we wait with impatience American occupation that comes to break the chain that has been forged constantly during four centuries of infamous spoliation, of torpid despotism and shameful moral slavery. When the rudders of the American ships entered the waters of the coast of Guánica to bear to this country political revolution, great confidence was born again, again was awakened the ideal of sleeping patriotism in our consciences and the lullaby of perfidious promises which have never been fulfilled. An entire city, with the exception of those who live under the shadow of pretense and official immunity, is prepared to solemnize the glorious tramp of civilization, and offers its blood as a holocaust to such a grand proposition. Let this message bear to you notice that our municipal conscience does not sleep and wait. Here you can count on the great masses who are prepared to second your gigantic strength. All the districts of this jurisdiction are prepared for combat. The districts of the city are also prepared. Men of intrepid hearts surround me, ready for the struggle. The only thing that prevents the manifestation of unity is an absolute need of the elements of war. On the other hand, we have already driven from the

town our eternal enemies to the rights of Puerto Ricans. I do not wish to impose upon my ideas of patriotism the grave responsibility of directing my men upon the enemy without capacity to maintain the struggle. In this moment of activity may this communication serve to dispose you to embrace an opportunity to utilize the services that I offer. Before closing, I wish to warn you that at the entrance to this city, on the roads of Adjuntas and Canas, the Spanish Government is actively engaged in constructing several trenches to foolishly obstruct the march of the army of liberty, and they are concealing themselves in the small neighboring hills and difficult passes in the cañons in order to carry out this resistance. With many wishes for your health and much appreciation of the great triumph of America, I am,

"Your humble servant,

"FELIX MATOS BERNIER."

"July 26, 1898. (Ponce, P. R.)"

To such a people it became my pleasure to issue a proclamation.

"Ponce, Puerto Rico, July 28, 1898.

"To the inhabitants of Puerto Rico:

"In the prosecution of the war against the Kingdom of Spain by the People of the United States, in the cause of Liberty, Justice and Humanity, its military forces have come to occupy the Island of Puerto Rico. They come bearing the banner of Freedom, inspired by a noble purpose to seek the enemies of our country and yours, and to destroy or capture all who are in armed resistance. They bring you the fostering arm of a nation of free people, whose greatest power is in its Justice and Humanity to all those living within its fold. Hence the first effect of this occupation will be the immediate release from your former political relations, and it is hoped a cheerful acceptance of the government of the United States.

"The chief object of the American military forces will be to overthrow the armed authority of Spain and to give to the people of your beautiful island the largest measure of liberty consistent with this military occupation. We have not come to make war upon the people of a country that for centuries have been oppressed, but, on the contrary, to bring you protection, not only to yourselves, but to your property, to promote your prosperity and bestow upon you the immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions of our government. It is not our purpose to interfere with any existing laws and customs that are wholesome and beneficial to your people so long as they conform to the rules of military administration of order and justice.

"This is not a war of devastation, but one to give to all within the control of its military and naval forces the advantages and blessings of enlightened civilization.

"NELSON A. MILFS,

"Major General Commanding United States Army."

The sentiment spread like magic over the island. It caused a large number of volunteers to immediately desert the cause and colors of Spain.

Brigadier-General Schwan arrived from Tampa on the 31st

with the 11th and 19th Infantry, a troop of the 2d Cavalry and two batteries of the 7th Artillery. Major-General Brooke arrived on the "St. Louis" July 31st, and was ordered to proceed the day following to Arroyo, about forty miles east of Ponce, where he landed on the 2d.

On the 1st of August Brigadier-General Peter C. Hains arrived on the "St. Paul" with the 4th Ohio Volunteers, and on the 2d the 4th Pennsylvania Volunteers arrived. Both these regiments were sent at once to join General Brooke.

As reinforcements continued to arrive they were assigned to the various columns, which it was desired to move with the least possible delay. It was known that the enemy, having been misled as to our supposed place of landing, had concentrated their forces nearly eighty miles from our point of occupation, and had subsequently decided to occupy and fortify a narrow pass in the mountains near Aibonito. This fact being known, it was our purpose to make strong demonstrations in front of that position, without the slightest idea, however, of sacrificing lives in a direct assault.

There was a trail over the mountains from Adjuntas to Utuado, a distance of some eighteen miles, but it was so rough that the Spaniards had considered it impracticable for the passage of troops, and had neither guarded nor fortified it. Brigadier-General Roy Stone, an officer of war experience and a skilled engineer, was directed to make it practicable. He was supplied with an adequate escort for his protection and given unlimited authority to employ native labor. He soon made the route practicable for the passage of General Garretson's command, which crossed over the mountains to the north side of the island.

On August 5th General Brooke had a sharp engagement with the Spanish troops at Guayama, which town was finally captured by our forces; and on August 8th another engagement took place as the result of a reconnaissance on the road north of Guayama. This reconnaissance developed the fact that the enemy was strongly entrenched on a crest commanding the road from six to eight miles north of Guayama, toward Cayey. One object of the movement under General Brooke was to intercept the enemy if he should fall back from Aibonito on the advance of General Wilson, and also to co-operate in the attack upon that place.

On August 6th General Schwan was ordered to proceed from Ponce to Yauco with six companies of the 11th Infantry, Troop

A, 5th Cavalry, and two batteries of light artillery, and on arrival there to take the balance of the 11th Infantry (which was already there) and organize his command preparatory to a movement by way of Sabana Grande, San German, Mayaguez and Lares to Arecibo, to which point it was intended to send General Garretson's column by the more direct route *via* Adjuntas and Utuado—all to be concentrated under General Henry, together with additional troops to be sent around by sea from Ponce to Arecibo; and it was intended that when a junction had been formed the division should march on San Juan. Arrangements had also been made to send a gunboat to Arecibo to assist, if required, in the taking of that place. The movement of this division from Arecibo to San Juan would have made the enemy's position at Aibonito and Cayey untenable and intercepted his retreat.

General Wilson, having pushed his troops forward on the road to San Juan, occupied on the 7th a line across a narrow valley about seven and one-half miles beyond the village of Juana Diaz. The enemy had a force of about 2,000 troops at Aibonito, thirty-five miles from Ponce, with an advanced position at Coamo, where it was estimated there were some 400 men. This advanced position could not be taken directly without great loss. General Wilson therefore decided, on the evening of the 8th, to send the 16th Pennsylvania Volunteers, under Colonel Hulings, by mountain cross-trails, which were known to be exceedingly difficult, over the divide into the valley of the Coamo River, so as to reach the main road in rear of Coamo. On the morning of the 9th General Ernst, with the main body of his brigade, moved forward to the attack, the brunt of the action, however, falling on the 16th Pennsylvania. The result was as planned. The enemy were mostly intercepted in their retreat, with a loss on our side of only six men wounded, while the enemy's loss was five officers and eleven men killed and sixty-seven wounded, and five officers and 192 men captured.

The four columns in their respective positions were now ready for a simultaneous advance, their ultimate destination being the same—San Juan; and their movements will be described according to location from west to east, which brings us first to that of General Schwan.

His command started from Yauco on August 9th. An engage-

ment took place on August 10th at Hormigueros with the entire garrison of Mayaguez (consisting of 1,362 men). The enemy was driven back and so badly defeated that he continued his retreat before our forces, evacuating Mayaguez, a city of 20,000 inhabitants, which place General Schwan entered at the head of his troops at 9.30 A. M. on the 11th. On the afternoon of the 11th General Schwan sent out detachments of cavalry on both the roads leading to Lares to get information of the enemy's movements, and learned that the enemy was proceeding slowly on the Las Marias road. He ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Burke of the 11th Infantry to take six companies of that regiment and one platoon each of cavalry and artillery and make a reconnaissance on the road toward Lares. Colonel Burke left Mayaguez at 10:30 A. M. on the 12th and arrived at the forks of the Las Marias and Maricao roads about sunset, where he bivouacked for the night. On the 13th he came up with a large force of Spaniards at the crossing of the Rio Prieto, near Las Marias, where a sharp engagement took place. On this reconnaissance seventeen Spaniards were killed, a large number wounded, and fifty-six prisoners taken. The victorious march of General Schwan's column, however, was arrested by the receipt, on the morning of the 14th, of orders to suspend hostilities. Lares was, in fact, evacuated by the Spaniards in anticipation of the advance of our troops.

From the 7th to the 15th of August General Schwan's troops marched ninety-two miles, occupied nine towns, made 162 regulars prisoners of war, captured and paroled 200 volunteers, captured much valuable material and practically cleared the western part of the island of the enemy.

On the 12th General Garretson's brigade had passed over the mountains and reached Utuado, and on the 13th General Henry had joined that part of his command at that point, when he received notice of the suspension of hostilities.

In his report General Henry states that Arecibo would have been occupied on the 14th. Had hostilities not been suspended at that particular time, the Spaniards retreating before Schwan's brigade would have been captured, as they were between two strong commands and escape was impossible.

By August 9th General Ernst's brigade, of Wilson's command, was encamped along the valley in advance of Coamo, with its outposts about five and one-half miles beyond that town.

On August 10th and 11th General Wilson had careful reconnoissances made of the enemy's position at Aibonito, as a result of which it was considered to be practicable to again turn the enemy by his right, to be effected by moving the main body of his (General Wilson's) command to Barranquitas, and thence to Aibonito, *via* Honduras, or to Cayei, *via* Comerio and Cidra, or to Las Cruces, on the main highway to San Juan, as circumstances might determine, leaving sufficient troops to hold the line occupied by our outposts in front of Aibonito. General Wilson had directed General Ernst to be prepared to make this movement at daylight on the morning of the 13th. In the meantime, on the 12th, partly for the purpose of diverting the enemy's attention from this projected movement, and to develop the strength of the Spanish batteries on the summit of Asomante Hill and El Penon, two and one-half miles northwest of Aibonito, a sharp artillery fire was opened on the enemy's position. Our artillery opened fire at 1 P. M. from a position on the reverse side of the low ridge to the left of the main road. When the turning movement was about to be made, General Wilson received the intelligence of the suspension of operations against the enemy.

By August 12th General Brooke had made complete preparations to move Hains' brigade against the Spanish position on the road between Guayama and Cayei, which was to be done on the following day. Early in the morning of that day (13th) General Hains proceeded with one regiment (the 4th Ohio) down the Ponce road, thence northward, with the view of turning the position of the Spanish force near Pablo Vasquez, on the main road to Cayei. He was to move to the rear of the Spanish forces, while General Brooke, with the 3d Illinois regiment, a part of the 4th Pennsylvania, some batteries and other troops, would engage them on the main road. General Brooke placed his troops in the desired position and waited until he thought General Hains was at or near the position he was to take, when the artillery was unmasked and everything was ready to shell the enemy. Just at this moment, however, General Brooke received the message announcing the suspension of military operations.

Such, briefly outlined, was the campaign that gave us Puerto Rico, where the flag has ever since floated, farther east than ever before.

NELSON A. MILES.